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ABSTRACT

The current concern with educational excellence and reform prompted by six recent national reports has significant implications for law-related education (LRE). These reports are A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, Action for Excellence, Making the Grade: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, Educating Americans for the 21st Century, Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do, and High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America. The six reports have several major recommendations in common that include the need to: clarify educational goals, strengthen school curricula, raise expectations for student performance, increase the time spent on academic subjects, improve teaching quality, and marshal the resources necessary to improve the schools. Law-related educators must respond to these recommendations by emphasizing the critical role of citizenship education, clarifying how LRE fits into the core curriculum, advocating the inclusion of LRE in competency testing, supporting incentives for professional training for teachers, and encouraging greater community involvement in education. (LP)

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MEETING THE CALLS FOR EXCELLENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR LAW-RELATED EDUCATION

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Education is in the news. It has become a subject of great national interest. A series of reports issued by prestigious national groups and commissions have succeeded in focusing public and professional attention on the importance of education, the quality of our educational system, and the need for substantial, far-reaching reform of that system. After many years of neglect, education is once again forcefully staking its claim for priority on the Nation's agenda.

The urgency of educational reform was articulated dramatically by the National Commission on Excellence in Education earlier this year. Appointed by Secretary of Education Bell in August, 1981, this 18-member Commission was charged with studying and reporting on the quality of education in America. The Commission released its report in late April, 1983. Entitled A Nation at Risk, the Commission asserted that

> Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them.... [T]he educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and as a people (p. 5).

To combat this situation, the Commission urged fundamental "reform of our educational system" and a renewal of "the Nation's commitment

SP 015 113

to schools and colleges of high quality throughout the length and breadth of our land" (p. 6).

The National Commission's report was soon followed by a number of other reports issued by various national groups. This paper focuses on six of the most important of these reports. Although they represent different constituencies and apply different lenses to assess our schools, these six reports have much in common. They reach similar conclusions about our schools and the pressing need for substantial reform of them.

We, who are interested in law-related education, need to become familiar with the calls for educational excellence and reform and to assess carefully their implications. This paper is intended to serve as a starting point for that process. The six reports are first considered individually and then collectively. Following this, some of the implications for law-related education are discussed.

I. Calls for Excellence: Six National Reports

A. The National Commission on Excellence in Education

Released as "an open letter to the American people," the National Commission on Excellence in Education Report, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, stresses the importance of education to the national interest. The report uses strong words to stress the need for educational reform.

> If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.... We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament (p. 5).

To date, A Nation at Risk, has received the most attention and has become the most widely read and discussed of the national reports.

The Commission's report identifies a long list of educational deficiencies that range in character from declining standardized test scores, to the lack of rigor in curriculum offerings, to low expectations for student performance, to the quality of teachers and the inadequate conditions under which teachers are asked to operate. To correct these dificiencies, the Commission calls for immediate and long-term improvement and sets forth a series of specific recommendations for that purpose. The recommendations fall into five major categories: (1) increasing high school graduation requirements; (2) adopting more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct; (3) using school time more effectively and lengthening the school day and/or the school year; (4) improving the preparation of teachers and making teaching a more rewarding and respected profession; and, (5) obtaining citizen support for providing necessary financial support for education and for holding educators and public officials raesponsible for providing the necessary leadership to make the suggested reforms possible.

B. Task Force on Education for Economic Growth of the Education Commission of the States

Action for Excellence, the report of the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth of the Education Commission of the States, begins by asserting that education is one of the "few national efforts that can legitimately be called crucial to our national survival" (p. 3). The 41 members of this Task Force, which included 14 governors, 13 business leaders, and six educators, characterize our current situation in education as one in which a real emergency exists which demands immediate

attention and action. Explicitly rejecting a "quick-fix" response, Action for Excellence sets forth an action plan calling for implementation of a series of recommendations which will require

> fundamental changes in the priority we Americans put on education; changes in the way we run our schools; changes in the ways we train, recruit and pay teachers and administrators; and changes in the very goals we set for public education in America" (p. 4).

The Task Force's recommendations call for the upgrading and expansion of basic skills competencies, a strengthened K-12 curriculum, more explicit, demanding requirements concerning school discipline, attendance, homework, and grades, an increase in the duration and intensity of the school day and year, periodic testing to assess student knowledge and skills, and improved teacher and principal recruitment, training, certification, evaluation, pay, and conditions of employment. Each governor is urged to develop a state plan for improving education in the state's public schools from kindergarten to grade 12. A particularly distinctive feature of this report is the emphasis given to the need for widespread community involvement in the schools.

C. Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy

The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force report, Making the Grade, begins with these words,

> The nation's public schools are in trouble. By almost every measure -- the commitment and competency of teachers, student test scores, truancy and dropout rates, crimes of violence -- the performance of our schools falls far short of expectations....[T]oo many young people are leaving the schools without acquiring essential learning skills and without self-discipline or purpose" (p. 3).

Asserting that the public schools "constitute the nation's most important

institution for the shaping of future citizens," the Task Force predicts disastrous consequences for the nation which "can be averted only if there is a national commitment to excellence in our public schools" (p. 3).

The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force concludes that "schools across the nation must at a minimum provide the same core components to all students." It identifies those core components as consisting of "the basic skills of reading, writing, and calculating; technical capability in computers; training in science and foreign languages; and knowledge of civics..." (p. 7). Of these components, the Task Force regards literacy in the English language as "the most important objective of elementary and secondary education in the United States" (p. 11). It also stresses the need for students to acquire proficiency in a second language and basic scientific literacy, including advanced training in science and math for secondary students.

In Making the Grade, the Task Force acknowledges the depressed state of the teaching profession and identifies some of the factors that have contribute to that situation. Declaring that "Good teachers are as valuable to the nation as new tanks or fighter planes or a new highway " (p. 11), the Task Force proposes the establishment of a Master Teachers Program, funded by the federal government, to recognize and reward teacher excellence.

Throughout the report, the role of the federal government is emphasized. While carefully emphasizing that "elementary and secondary education in the United States must primarily remain a responsibility of state and local governments" (p. 21), the Twentieth Century Fund Task

Force consistently calls for an expanded role for the federal government in promoting, supporting, and achieving quality education in our public schools. Of the six reports, Making the Grade makes the strongest case for an expanded federal role in education and provides the most specific recommendations for this to occur.

D. Report of the National Science Board's Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology

Educating Americans for the 21st Century proposes

> sweeping and drastic change: in the breadth of student participation, in our methods and quality of teaching, in the preparation and motivation of our children, in the content of our courses, and in our standards of achievements (pp. v-vi).

This report, prepared by the National Science Board's Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology, specifies a detailed plan for making this country's elementary and secondary mathematics, science and technology education the finest in the world by 1995 "as measured by achievement scores and participation levels" (p.). However, although emphasizing the need for improved mathematics, science, and technology education, the National Science Board's Commission also acknowledges the vital need for developing plans and proposals to address "glaring deficiences in the teaching and learning of English and the foreign languages, history and political science, the classics, art, music, and other areas of study important for life in the 21st century"(p. 6).

Among the report's major recommendations are those which call for increased time for mathematics, science, and technology instruction (e.g., 50 minutes of mathematics and 30 minutes of science in grades K-6)

and more rigorous standards for high school promotion and graduation (e.g., at least three years of mathematics and of science and technology). The report gives major attention to the need for improving the quality of the teaching profession -- standards, training, working conditions, and rewards (e.g., it recommends differential salary structures, career ladders, extended employment, and better recognition). The report also urges that the President of the United States appoint a National Education Council to identify national education goals and ways to achieve them, to insure that mechanisms exist for measuring and comparing academic achievement of all students, and to monitor and regularly report on progress toward the achievement of those goals. It advocates the formation of state task forces and community-school partnerships.

E. The College Board Educational EQuality Project Report

Seeking to establish closer association and more effective communication with secondary schools and colleges, the College Board's Educational EQuality Project Report, Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do, outlines what the College Board believes to constitute necessary preparation for entering college. Recognizing that, in recent years, many college entrants have been inadequately prepared, the College Board's Report attempts to remedy that situation by making clear what it perceives to be the essential academic competencies and knowledge college entrants need to possess. The report identifies basic academic competencies as consisting of reading, writing, speaking and listening, mathematics, reasoning, studying and computers. The report also identifies six basic academic subjects (i.e., English, the Arts,

Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Foreign Language), and, for each, provides a rationale for its importance and an outline of what students need to know.

The focus of Academic Preparation for College is on learning outcomes as opposed to specifying how those outcomes are to be achieved. It does not contain descriptions of high school curricula but guidelines for use in shaping the secondary school curricula. Thus, by virtue of this focus, the College Board is distinct in many ways from the other five reports. While recognizing the need for educational reform, the report is much more specific that the others with respect to what students need to know and much less specific -- in fact, virtually silent -- on such issues as the conditions of schools, the quality of teaching, and the financial and political means for bringing about change.

F. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America is the title of major study of the American high school by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Written by Ernest Boyer, High School is the longest and, in many ways, the most reasoned and thoughtful of the six reports reviewed in this paper. Published by Harper and Row (363 pages), High School advocates substantial reform and, like the other reports, cautions against abandoning our commitment to equity in the wake of cries for excellence and market related competencies.

Boyer takes issue with proposals to emphasize science, mathematics, and foreign language to the exclusion of other subjects, to reduce course electives, and to lengthen the school day and year. He argues

that "more substance, not more time, is our most urgent problem" (p. 84). Boyer recommends that each high school take seriously the need for educational goals, develop meaningful ones, and work to achieve those goals. He stresses the need for high schools to offer a common core curriculum which all students take and to counsel students to choose additional electives wisely.

The core curriculum Boyer proposes is the most specific example of how the high school curriculum should change to meet the calls for excellence. Discussed in detail in the report, the outlines of the proposed core are as follows:

1. Language -- one year of writing, one year of literature, one-half year of speech, one-half year of the arts, and two year of a foreign language;
2. Social Studies -- one year of American History, one year of Western Civilization, one-half year of Non-Western Studies, and one year of Civics;
3. Science -- one year of physical science and one year of biological science
4. Mathematics -- two years
5. Technology -- one-half year (history of and ethical and social issues raised by technology);
6. Health -- one half-year (i.e., "lifetime fitness");
7. Seminary on Work -- one-half year (emphasizing the "dignity and significance of work"); and
8. Senior Independent Project -- one-half year (a written report that focuses on a significant contemporary issue from an interdisciplinary perspective). (see pp. 94-117)

Like most of the other reports, Boyer emphasizes the need to improve teaching and the teaching profession -- confronting the working conditions that drive good teachers from the classroom, providing adequate recognition and rewards, and improving teacher salaries. Differential salaries are rejected and more paid time for professional growth and development is

is urged. He articulates specific suggestions for improving teacher working conditions (e.g., no more than four formal class meetings a day), recruiting teachers (e.g., establishing a National Teacher Service Corps), training teachers (e.g., a five-year program), and credentialing teachers (e.g., passing state in English proficiency and subject matter competence).

Boyer also urges closer cooperation between schools and colleges, businesses, government bodies, and citizens. He stresses that "school improvement is dependent on public commitment....Citizens, local school boards, state agencies and legislators, and the federal government must work together to help bring excellence to our public schools" (p. 318).

G. Six National Reports: A Synthesis of Recommendations

The six national reports summarized in this paper have much in common. With the exception of the College Board Report, the reports, as a whole, emphasize the need for:

1. Clarifying educational goals and making them more specific by: (a) making educational excellence a national priority; (b) establishing explicit, meaningful learning outcomes; and, (c) providing all students with quality education.

2. Clarifying and strengthening school curricula by: (a) placing strong emphasis on developing academic competencies in such basic areas as reading, writing, computing, and thinking; and, (b) providing and requiring all students to complete more extensive and more rigorous courses in English, Science, Mathematics, Foreign Languages, Social Studies, and the Humanities -- especially the first four.

3. Raising academic standards and increasing expectations for student performance by: (a) insisting on academic excellence in student work and content mastery; (b) raising graduation and college entrance requirements; and, (c) using standardized tests to evaluate student achievement by implementing a system of local and state testing and reporting on the results of those tests.

4. Increasing the time spent on academic subjects by: (a) making more effective use of the time currently available during the school day and year; and, (b) considering proposals to lengthen the school day and school year.

5. Improving the quality of teaching by: (a) attracting more capable people to teaching, strengthening teacher training, and making teacher certification more rigorous; (b) improving teacher working conditions to enable teachers to teach more effectively; (c) providing career ladders and more appropriate compensation for teachers; (d) developing ways to recognize and reward superior teachers; and, (e) insisting upon good teaching and using effective, more rigorous evaluation of teachers.

6. Marshalling the necessary resources to improve the schools by: (a) securing local, state, and federal support for financing and implementing needed reforms; (b) improving the management of the schools; and, (c) establishing effective coalitions of educators, government officials, business and labor leaders, professionals, and other members of the community to work more closely with schools and to work for and help achieve excellence and educational equity in our schools.

II. Implications for Law-Related Education

In many ways, advocates of law-related education have much in common with the members of the various task forces who have recently issued reports calling for reform of the nation's elementary and secondary schools. The law-related education movement is in essence a reform movement which emphasizes the critical importance of education and seeks to improve the quality of education in our schools. While the reforms advocated by law-related education supporters may not be as broad in scope nor a substantive in nature, they are nevertheless rooted in the same soil. We should welcome the current push for educational reform and lend our support to it. In so doing, however, we need to consider carefully what is being advocated and insist upon quality education for all students, not just an elite group of students.

Some of the recommendations made in the various national reports

have clear implications for law-related education. A number of these are identified and discussed in this section of the paper. Essentially, these implications fall into five main areas. Each area is considered separately.

A. Clarification of Educational Goals

Few Americans are likely to quarrel with the emphasis the national reports place on excellence and the need to provide students with a quality education. On the surface, "excellence" and "quality education" are prized goals. Yet, as individuals and groups attempt to articulate what they mean by those terms, disagreements inevitably develop. A clear consensus does not exist about what we mean by excellence in education nor does one exist about what we believe constitutes the essential ingredients of a quality education.

The national reports themselves and the reactions they have provoked suggest the basis for new hope that a serious national dialogue on the meaning of excellence and quality education will take place. Those of us who are interested in law-related education must become part of this dialogue. We must insure that important perspectives are shared and thoughtfully considered so that the voices calling for a narrow, utilitarian vision of education do not drown out other voices calling for a broader, more comprehensive vision of education. Our current economic situation may have been the catalyst for the renewed interest in education but it must not dictate our response.

As a national dialogue on education takes place, there is a pressing need for emphasizing and clarifying the nature, characteristics, and value of citizenship education programs. Like excellence and quality education, citizenship education is also a concept to which many give

lip service but for which there is no clear consensus about its meaning. A number of the national reports make reference to the importance of education for citizenship but they are vague on what they mean by this. We, who are interested in law-related education, have an important perspective to share on citizenship education and a special interest in seeing to it that citizenship education receives the priority it deserves in any dialogue on educational goals.

B. Nature of the Curriculum

Throughout the national reports, the need for widespread, substantial curriculum reform is stressed. Action for Excellence urges

> the states and local school systems to launch energetic efforts to strengthen the curriculum from kindergarten through high school....[to provide] richer substance and greater motivational power; to eliminate "soft," non-essential courses; to involve students more enthusiastically in learning; and to encourage the mastery of skills beyond the basics (p. 38; emphasis in the original).

A Nation at Risk characterizes secondary school curricula as lacking in central purpose, a kind of cafeteria where "appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses" (p. 18). That report recommends that

> State and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened, and that, at a minimum, all students seeking a diploma be required...[to complete]: (a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of Science; (d) 3 years of Social Studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science (p. 24).

In addition, two years of a foreign language is recommended for the college-bound and the objectives to be achieved in each of the six subject areas are described.

Academic Preparation for College provides a framework for revising secondary school curricula by describing the knowledge and skills students

need for success in college. Its implications for re-shaping secondary curricula are clear. Educating Americans for the 21st Century recommends specific curriculum changes for improving instruction in mathematics and science. Making the Grade urges implementation of a curriculum core common to all schools in the country. Though general in nature, the report nevertheless specifies key curriculum emphases. And, High School goes further than any of the other reports. Warning that "Beefing up traditional academic courses, while essential, is not sufficient" (p. 114), Boyer stresses the need for a common core curriculum and specifies the nature and substance of such a core.

The reports are not alone in their calls for curriculum reform. Many states and local districts have already initiated changes in graduation requirements. A number of colleges and universities have also taken action by raising admission standards to require applicants to complete more coursework in science, mathematics, English and other subjects.

Where does law-related education fit in these calls for curriculum reform? This is an extremely important question. Despite the strong emphasis that the six reports give to English, Science, Mathematics, and Foreign Language, Social Studies -- the most fertile ground for law-related education -- has not been totally ignored. A National at Risk includes social studies as one of the essentials of a strong curriculum. Making the Grade emphasizes the importance of Civics in a quality education. Academic Preparation for College provides both a rationale for social studies and a description of the knowledge and skills it should foster. And, Boyer's High School argues forcefully for the

inclusion of social studies in a common core curriculum for high school students. (In fact, Boyer cites as exemplary, two examples of law-related education classes which his research team observed. One of these was a mock trial and the other a unit featuring courtroom observation, speakers in the classroom, and student interviews with jurors and prosecutors.)

Elective courses represent perhaps the most successful way by which law-related education has become a meaningful part of the high school and junior high school curriculum. Yet, some of the recommendations in the national reports appear to threaten the viability of this approach, both in terms of the staying power of of courses already in place as well as the potential for adding others. For example, recommendations to reduce a "smorgasbord" curriculum may mean fewer elective courses. Increased graduation requirements in mathematics, science, and foreign language, as well as the likelihood of additional courses in and greater stress on these subject areas, may limit and/or divert students from enrolling in law-related elective courses. The establishment of a core curriculum or moves to develop more standardized curriculum patterns may inhibit the growth or even eliminate law-related elective courses in many schools.

Those of us who are interested in law-related education must recognize and assess the potential impact that some of the national report recommendations and recently enacted changes in curriculum and graduation requirements will have for law-related education. We must reaffirm and emphasize the importance of law-related education and make clear how and where law-related education fits in a quality education curriculum. In so doing, we must develop appropriate

strategies and engage in necessary activities to guarantee that law-related eduction is included, rather than excluded, from the curriculum changes which are taking place now and those which will inevitably follow in subsequent months and years.

C. Emphasis on Competency Testing

Competency testing, or using some form of common tests to measure subject matter knowledge and skill proficiency, is emphasized in many of the national reports. It is an idea which has been gaining increasing strength. The Task Force on Education for Economic Growth (i.e. Action for Excellence) reports that "Thirty-seven states now have some form of competency testing or assessment of student achievement to measure educational effectiveness" (p. 46). Thus, whether we support or oppose the idea of competency testing, it is clear that competency testing is rapidly becoming a fact of life in most states. We can ill afford to ignore this reality.

If law-related education is to be an integral part of the school curriculum, then local district or state-wide competency tests must include items which measure student mastery of law-related content and skills. In the past, the tendency has been for schools to use competency tests to measure students knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. One of the consequences has been that, in the elementary grades, those three areas were over-emphasized and other subject areas ignored. In some elementary schools, science and social studies instruction have all but disappeared.

The new mood seems to be in the direction of competency testing in all subject areas. As this takes place, we must make sure that

law-related content is included in the testing process. If it is not, then teachers are very likely to ignore it, realizing that law-related education is not prized nor rewarded.

Competency testing can provide a new stimulus for law-related education. In both the development of the tests themselves as well as in the process of choosing a particular version of a test, we have an opportunity to influence and shape the nature and content of school curricula. Thus, in some respects a state and/or local district competency testing program provides more opportunities to assure that law-related education is a meaningful part of the elementary and secondary curriculum and that it is taught effectively.

D. Improving the Quality of Teaching

Since the teacher is the key to quality education, it is not surprising to find that the national reports give strong emphasis to the need for improving the quality of teaching and the quality of conditions for teaching. Recommendations in this area are many. They range from reforms in the manner that teachers are recruited, trained, and certified, to changes to improve working conditions in schools, to raising teacher status and compensation, to evaluating teacher performance more rigorously. While a detailed discussion of most of these recommendations is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that law-related education has a vital interest in improving the quality of teaching and the teaching profession.

Some of the most intriguing recommendations suggested in several of the national reports concern proposals to lengthen the period of employment during a school year or providing additional ways to provide time for teacher to engage in professional growth and development activities.

For example, A Nation at Risk recommends that school boards adopt an 11-month contract for teachers, the additional time to be used to have teachers become involved in curriculum improvement and professional development. Boyer, in High School, recommends that a two-week "Teacher Professional Development Term" be added to the school year, with appropriate compensation for teachers, the time to be used by teachers for study and instructional improvement. Both High School and Making the Grade recommend a special type of sabbatical program -- the former a paid "Summer Study Term" and the latter a five-year "Master Teacher" program. In short, the reports emphasize the importance of professional growth and development and the need for teachers to be given time (and compensation) for this.

The law-related education movement has long recognized the vital role of the classroom teacher and the importance of and need for professional growth and development. Law-related project of various kinds sponsor and conduct teacher-training workshops and courses which focus on increasing teacher knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy. These programs provide scholarships to encourage and support teacher involvement such as (e.g., tuition grants, stipends, travel, etc.). If recommendations of the kind discussed above are acted upon, the opportunities for increasing law-related teacher education programs will greatly increase. Hence, we should lend our support to local, state, and federal initiatives which enable teachers to engage in more professional growth and development experiences and that include those experiences as part of teachers employment.

Boyer reminds us that

> Whatever is wrong with America's public schools cannot be fixed without the help of those teachers already in

> the classrooms. Most of them will be there for years to come, and such teachers must be viewed as part of the solution, not the problem.... (pp. 154-155)
>
> Everything we know about teachers suggests that they are able and willing to meet the challenges of rebuilding the profession. But they need the tools and backing to do the job (p. 185)

E. Stimulating Greater Community Involvement in Education

In Action for Excellence, the Task Force of the Education Commission of the States urged the creation of "broader and more effective partnerships for improving education in the states and communities of the nation" (p. 35). More specifically, the Task Force strongly recommended that "leaders outside the traditional educational system...take specific steps to help improve the schools" (p. 35). Suggestions for doing this included team teaching, teacher training, on-site experiences for students in the community, sponsoring recognition for outstanding teachers, and marshalling resources needed to pay for quality education.

Those in law-related education have long recognized the need for and value of community involvement. Lawyers, judges, police officers, corrections officials, legislators, and others continue to be deeply involved in law-related education programs in schools across the country. They participate regularly in such programs as "lawyer (or police officer, etc.) in the classroom," mock trial court tours, ride-a-long (and other "shadow" experiences), and teacher training. They serve as members of local, county, state, and national law-related education advisory boards. Bar associations help to sponsor and finance law-related centers and

programs, publis and distribute curriculum materials, conduct mock trial competitions, and sponsor both teacher training and teacher recognition programs. In law-related education, community involvement is both extensive and pervasive. It is one of law-related education's greatest strengths.

The national reports which call for closer ties between schools and community members and groups serve to remind us of how important community involvement has been to law-related education. We must insure that the bridges which have been built do not deteriorate after a grant ends or after an initial program phase concludes. We need to reinforce those bridges and expand them and also try to build new ones in order to have an effective network of interconnecting bridges. In some states, state-wide law-related advisory boards and/or programs have yet to be formed. This is also true of many communities within the fifty states. Having the national reports reaffirm the importance of community involvement should serve as a stimulus for those of us in law-related education to strengthen and expand what is already in place and to seek to achieve greater and more widespread community support for and involvement in law-related education.

III. Conclusion

The indictments of our schools and educational system that are contained in a number of the national reports have a familiar ring. Very likely we have pinpointed many of the same problems and voiced personal concerns about them. We may have tried to do something about these problems. Yet, individually or collectively we have made but modest progress in bringing about needed change.

As we read and listen to the latest round of critiques and reform proposals, some of us are undoubtedly tempted to dismiss them as well-meaning but bereft of power to effect any real change, a "so what's new" response which sees little hope for any real change taking place. We may also be tempted to adopt a defensive posture, regarding the current efforts as constituting yet one more wave of assaults on the public's confidence in our schools and fearing that public support will be further eviscerated and our teachers will be subjected to a new round of criticism and ridicule.

Such temptations should be avoided. Defensiveness may be the natural reaction but it is not necessarily the wisest. Criticism and scrutiny also carry the promise of opportunities for change. In fact, Boyer suggests that recent concerns about America's schools offers "fresh hope" that a serious, coherent plan for school reform will be adopted. He regards the current interest in the schools which has been stimulated by the national reports as constituting "the best opportunity we will have in this century to improve the schools" (p. 1).

Like the joke about the farmer who used the two-by-four board to get the mule's attention, the national reports have been big sticks and they have our attention. What's needed now is for us to recognize the possibilities for and implications of change in our schools and to do what we can to bring about meaningful change. This is an opportunity we cannot afford to ignore or neglect. In the words of one of America's more popular fictional figures, this is an offer we cannot afford to refuse.

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